

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 BRUSSE 04428 162025Z

17

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASDHC 3930

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E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PINT, BE

SUBJECT: TINDEMANS AGAIN DEFUSES LINGUISTIC PROBLEM

REF: A. BRUSSELS 2149

B. BRUSSELS 2239

C. BRUSSELS 2345

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

SUMMARY. PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS DEFUSES RECURRING LINGUISTIC PROBLEM IN BRUSSELS BY ANNOUNCING THAT ISSUE OF SEPARATE FACILITIES IN SCHAEERBEEK (REF A) HAS BEEN REFERRED TO COUNCIL OF STATE. THIS ACTION, SETTING IN MOTION A DELIBERATIVE PROCESS WHICH WILL RUN FOR MONTHS, SHARPLY REDUCES LIKELIHOOD OF SERIOUS TROUBLE FOR TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT OVER LINGUISTIC ISSUE. HOWEVER, FLIEMISH NATIONALISTS STILL PLAN DEMONSTRATION JUNE 8. END SUMMARY.

1. LINGUISTIC PROBLEM, TAKING THE FORM OF SEPARATE FACILITIES FOR FRENCH-AND DUTCH-SPEAKING CITIZENS IN COMMUNES IN BRUSSELS, AGAIN CAME TO THE FORE IN EARLY MAY. TENSION ROSE IN BRUSSELS POLITICAL QUARTERS AFTER LINGUISTIC COMMISSION FAILED TO PRESENT SCHAEERBEEK CASE (REF B) TO COUNCIL OF STATE FOR BINDING DECISION

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PAGE 02 BRUSSE 04428 162025Z

AS PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS HAD URGED IT TO DO IN MARCH.

TO PROTEST DELAY IN RESOLVING THIS ISSUE, OPPOSITION FLEMISH NATIONALIST PARTY (VOLKSUNIE - VU) INTRODUCED IN PARLIAMENT BILL WHICH WOULD PROHIBIT SEPARATE LANGUAGE FACILITIES IN BRUSSELS. DURING DEBATE IN HOUSE MAY 15 ON WHETHER TO TREAT VU BILL AS PRIORITY MATTER, TINDEMANS ANNOUNCED LINGUISTIC COMMISSION HAD SENT THIS QUESTION TO COUNCIL OF STATE FOR DECISION WHICH WOULD BE BINDING ON COMMUNIE OF SCHAEERBEEK. HOUSE REJECTED MOTION TO GIVE VU BILL PRIORITY WITH GOVERNMENT PARTIES VOTING EN BLOC AGAINST THE OPPOSITION SOCIALISTS SPLIT ON THIS ISSUE.

2. NEVERTHELESS, FLEMISH NATIONALIST PARA-MILITARY GROUP, TAAL AKTIE KOMITEE (TAL), WHICH IS CLOSE TO VOLKSUNIE, HAS SCHEDULED ANOTHER DEMONSTRATION IN BRUSSELS JUNE 8 (WITH OR WITHOUT GOVERNMENT AUTHORIZATION) TO PROTEST SCHAEERBEEK SYSTEM (REF C).

3. TO COMPLICATE TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT PROBLEMS, IN EARLY MAY TWO PREDOMINANTLY FRANCOPHONE BRUSSELS COMMUNES (FOREST AND ETTERBEEK) DECIDED TO INSTITUTE SYSTEM SIMILAR TO SCHAEERBEEK'S "SEPARATE-BUT-EQUAL" REGIME. ACTING UNDER 1963 LINGUISTIC LAW, INTERIOR MINISTER QUICKLY ANNULLED FOREST DECISION BEFORE IT WAS IMPLEMENTED. HOWEVER, HE WAS TOO LATE TO ANNUL ETTERBEEK DECISION, WHICH IS ALREADY IN EFFECT. ETTERBEEK COUNCIL DECIDED MAY 15 TO RETAIN ITS SYSTEM, CLAIMING IT IS A STRICTLY INTERNAL COMMUNAL MATTER OF NO CONCERN TO MININTERIOR.  
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4. COMMENT: PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS, WHOSE STRATEGY IN DIFFICULT BRUSSELS LINGUISTIC PROBLEM IS TO DROWN POLITICAL PASSIONS IN A SWAMP OF LEGALISTIC DELIBERATIONS, HAS AGAIN DEFUSED PROBLEM FOR TIME BEING BY PREVAILING ON LINGUISTIC COMMISSION TO SEND ISSUE TO COUNCIL OF STATE. THE COUNCIL, A QUASI-JUDICIAL BODY, MUST DECIDE WHETHER TO GO BEYOND ITS DECISION OF JULY 1974 WHEN IT DECLARED SCHAEERBEEK SYSTEM INCONSISTENT WITH 1963 LINGUISTIC LAW, BUT DID NOT ISSUE A CEASE-AND-DESIST ORDER. WE MAY BE SURE COUNCIL WILL PROCEED WITH ALL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 BRUSSE 04428 162025Z

DELIBERATE SPEED. FLEMISH NATIONALISTS CAN BE EXPECTED TO KEEP IN PUBLIC EYE (AND SUSTAIN THEIR OWN MORALE) BY MANEUVERS IN PARLIAMENT AND STREET ACTIONS SUCH AS THAT PLANNED JUNE 8. BUT VU PRESIDENT HUGO SCHILTZ HAS TOLD US IN CONFIDENCE VU WILL STOP SHORT OF FORMING A GOVERNMENT CRISIS, WHICH HE SAYS, WOULD BE BAD FOR THE COUNTRY AND FOR HIS PARTY.  
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